



DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES

News Release

LINDA LINGLE
GOVERNOR

LAURA H. THIELEN, CHAIRPERSON
Phone: (808) 587-0320
Fax: (808) 587-0390

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STATE OF HAWAII, USDA PARTNER ON CONSERVATION PROGRAM TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY, WILDLIFE HABITAT, RESTORE WETLANDS AND NATIVE FORESTS

HONOLULU – The Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) announced today that the State of Hawai‘i and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) have entered into a new Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) agreement to protect coastal and stream water quality, improve wildlife habitat, and restore native forests and wetlands.

“The State of Hawai‘i is proud to collaborate with USDA on this new program that will improve water quality and wildlife habitat and protect vital watersheds and riparian areas on agricultural land on six of the main Hawaiian Islands,” said Laura H. Thielen, DLNR Chairperson.

The agreement is for the islands of Hawai‘i, Maui, Moloka‘i, Lana‘i, Kaua‘i and O‘ahu. The goal is to enroll up to 15,000 acres of marginal pastureland and cropland that will be converted to native areas through participation in the program. This agreement is aimed at improving water quality in stream systems, increasing groundwater recharge, restoring native species habitats and forests, controlling the spread of invasive species, and enhancing near shore coastal and coral reef health through land-based management.

DLNR will lead the program for the state with assistance from partner state agencies, the Departments of Agriculture and Health, as well as support from the University of Hawai‘i system, local Watershed Partnerships and other organizations to support the goals of Hawai‘i CREP. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) will administer the project working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and DLNR.

“Partnerships formed through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program will create an umbrella that allows conservation partners to be more effective throughout the state,” said Thielen. “It supplies one of the missing pieces needed for conservation support on agricultural lands.”

Under the Hawai‘i CREP, participants will receive annual rental payments, cost-share reimbursement payments, as well as other one-time incentive payments from both CCC and the State of Hawai‘i for voluntarily enrolling land in the program and installing conservation practices.

“The program gives agricultural producers an opportunity and flexibility to manage their land and fulfill stewardship goals that will set the foundations for better land use and returns,” said Paul Conry, DLNR Division of Forestry and Wildlife administrator. “CREP land-based restoration will contribute to improvement in water quality and quantity, enhance wildlife habitat, and protect the State’s coral reef systems.”

The total cost of the Hawai‘i CREP over the life of the project is estimated at \$67 million for a total enrollment of 15,000 acres. The USDA will contribute 80 percent (\$53.6 million) of the funds and the state will contribute 20 percent (\$13.4 million) through payments to enrolled landowners and in-kind services as support of the overall program cost. The state funds will come from the Forest Stewardship Special Fund as allocated during the 2006 legislative session.

“The Hawai‘i CREP project will bring federal monies in support of conservation that will not only benefit agricultural producers but also the general public through improvement in the State’s natural resources,” Conry said.

The program will run for 20 years. Landowners will be asked to enroll in 15-year contracts and there is a 5 -ear enrollment period in which landowners can sign up.

The signup date for this program is expected to be announced soon. More information can be found at www.hawaii.gov/dlnr/dofaw/crep

Farmers and ranchers will be able to apply for this program with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) at their local County USDA Service Center offices. FSA will administer this CREP project working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and DLNR.

A component of the CRP, CREP is a voluntary federal-state natural resources conservation program that addresses state and nationally significant agricultural-related environmental concerns. Participants remove degraded cropland and marginal pastureland from agricultural production and convert the land to native trees, shrubs, grasses, and other vegetation or wetland restoration measures.

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For more information news media may contact:
Deborah Ward
DLNR Public information specialist
Phone: (808) 587-0320